

POSTIES FIGHT BACK

As we go to press, over 30,000 postal workers are on wildcat strike. This strike has rapidly spread across the country in a short period of time. This dispute is mainly over terms and conditions, after the Communication Worker's Union's (CWU) ballot over national strike action was lost the Royal Mail management have tried to press ahead with 'modernisation' of the service. 'Modernisation' of course being destruction of the union, wage cuts and slashing up to 30,000 jobs.

Walkouts began after the suspension of sixteen drivers in West London who refused to deliver mail door to door, but have now spread to much of the country with most sorting offices closed across the capital and in many other towns, around 15 of Britain's 73 postal areas are closed because of wildcat action. Sorting offices in Oxford walked out when they noticed managers try to trick them into sorting mail destined for their striking counterparts in London. Scottish postal workers are set to joining the strike soon, as many posties are deciding to stop being picked off one by one, one sorting office at a time and face up to management head-on, together.

The CWU is currently negotiating with the Royal Mail management to try and resolve the dispute and have been accused by Adam Crozier (Royal Mail Chief Executive) of encouraging the unofficial strikes. The Royal Mail have been seeking legal advice to try and prosecute the CWU under anti-union laws, this will probably be the laws most significant test since the Royal Mail successfully challenged the CWU's right to hold strikes without ballots in 1990.

Officially the CWU has attempted to distance itself from the dispute and has

faxed letters condemning each instance of wildcat strikes, but a number of local officials have been seen on picket lines, and the Royal Mail claim that the CWU has been orchestrating escalation of the strike behind the scenes. One thing that is clear is that postal workers across the country are clearly unhappy with their working conditions and it is really important that we show solidarity with them and support their struggle.

In attempts to discourage and intimidate strikers senior Royal Mail staff have asked management at sorting offices to film and photograph picket lines and meetings. There have even been cases of bosses hiring 'bouncers' to try and physically intimidate pickets. In some areas Dairy bosses have offered the services of milkmen as scab labour.

Because the strike's unofficial there isn't any strike pay, so it try to get down to your local picket line to show solidarity, and set up a collection at your workplace, neighbourhood or university. To find out where your nearest sorting office is call 08457 223344 and ask for 'Royal Mail'.

Jim M.

The situation with the strike is changing rapidly so to keep in touch with the latest developments see www.enrager.net/newswire

- The workplace is a battlefield between workers and bosses for control. Control over who determines wages and conditions. Control over how and when people work. Sometimes workers have the upper hand, more recently bosses have. The onslaught on worker's pension rights is one recent example of this. Of course even when the bosses have the upper hand workers still find ways around subverting procedures and rules. While strike levels have fallen, the



number of workers taking 'sickies' has risen. Taking a day off sick when you are not is as much a form of action as an overtime ban. It should be noted though that sickness levels amongst workers have grown also because of genuine ill health (including stress) as bosses have tried to squeeze more and more out of their workforces.

In 2002 some 1.3 million days were lost through official strike action. In 1972 nearly 24 million were. The actual number of disputes taking place is under two hundred (i.e. a handful of major disputes make up most of the days lost). During the 1950s, '60s and '70s, three thousand, four thousand,

five thousand or more workplaces were hit by actions every year.

Very few workers are currently involved in disputes, although the number is rising. It is also sobering to note that in the private sector just one in five workers belong to a union. Even where there are disputes workers cross picket lines. There is a job to be done arguing for solidarity and building the confidence of workers.

To be more positive though it does seem that the spirit of revolt is building amongst some workers, which could and should help, lay the foundations for increased class-consciousness.

The authoritarian left senses that they

will be able to benefit from the upturn in militancy. The Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) dominated Socialist Alliance has organised a Convention of the trade union left for 7th February in London. Topics for discussion include 'who should we vote for at the next election?' and 'what should we do about political funds'. This is clearly another crude attempt to take union members money and channel it into the Socialist Alliance.

Anarchists do not see strikes as an opportunity to sell papers or recruit people. Our solidarity is genuine but we cannot leave the field clear for the likes of the SWP.

DOWN THE TUBE

On 17th October a Piccadilly line underground train crashed, while less than 36 hours later a train derailed at Camden. Later three thousand more people were stranded on the Victoria Line and had to be evacuated.

Several people were injured in these incidents – which, along with a crash on the Central line several months ago, coincidentally followed the privatisation of large sections of the Underground network.

The maintenance of the lines was sold off to two corporations – Metronet and Tube Lines.

After the Camden crash tube drivers staged an impromptu go-slow, reducing their speed to just ten miles per hour in some areas to ensure safety. The RMT will also be balloting for Christmas

strike action against the bosses' poor safety policies.

A leaked report today showed that Tube bosses were told six months ago that safety measures were inadequate and ultrasonic equipment was needed to detect broken rails – the cause of the Piccadilly crash. The report also showed bosses knew there are nearly eight thousand faults in the system. But of course for private companies profits will always come first, and the safety of workers and users last.

We must support the strikes of the London Underground workers, which are for the safety of all of us, in any way that we can, and we should work for a safe public transport system, democratically controlled by its users and workers.

Alex Allison

BUSH IN LONDON

George Bush will be in London from 19th to 21st November. This is the first state visit since Woodrow Wilson's in 1918 – Reagan's wasn't a state visit despite his staying in Windsor Castle. In normal times, the red carpet would be rolled out for Bush and he'd enjoy all the trimmings the British establishment can think of. These are not normal times!

Unlike Bush's Australian junket, he won't be addressing the Houses of Parliament. He won't get a ride in a coach down the Mall with Liz Windsor, the Queen. Fears of Labour MPs walking out scuppered the first; concerns about unseemly Demonstrations put paid to the latter. Little has thus far been given away about Bush's itinerary. He's supposed to visit the Tomb of the

Unknown Soldier at Westminster Abbey. There's supposed to be a big banquet for him at the City of London's Guildhall. And it's rumoured he'll be attending the Police Review Gala Awards Dinner on 20th November.

Many people are fuming that Bush is coming to town. Where their anger finds expression is so far uncertain: but just as the STWC's 15th February demonstration was massive despite it being organised by a self-seeking cabal of authoritarians, so their 20th November demonstration may well attract larger numbers than the CND, SWP and their lackeys expect.

Many years ago, Richard Nixon, then Vice President, was nearly lynched on a visit to Venezuela. Will a more fatal encounter happen to Bush? There

will be a full report of Bush's visit in Freedom in a few weeks' time.

John Stephenson

Just some of the special events taking place to mark Bush's visit:

- Wednesday 19th November: Alternative State Procession, 11am in Jubilee Gardens on the South Bank, London (nearest tube Waterloo).
- Wednesday 19th November: March to the US consulate at 6pm from Charlotte Square, Edinburgh.
- Thursday 20th November: Stop Bush Demo, meet 2pm in Malet Street, London, and march to Hyde Park.
- 25th November: Resist Bush! protest against the state visit, meet at Montague Place in Worthing from 4pm, followed by Burning Bush event.

Home and away

FREEDOM

Volume 64 Number 21

Anarchism

Anarchists work towards a society of mutual aid and voluntary co-operation. We reject all government and economic repression.

Freedom Press is an independent anarchist publisher. Besides this newspaper, which comes out every two weeks, we produce books on all aspects of anarchist theory and practice.

In our building in Whitechapel we run Britain's biggest anarchist bookshop and host a social centre and meeting space, the Autonomy Club. We're currently developing open-access IT provision for activists to use.

Our aim is to explain anarchism more widely and to show that human freedom can only thrive when the institutions of state and capital have been abolished.

Changes

Readers will have noticed further changes in the last two issues of Freedom, in addition to those which accompanied the redesign in September. These reflect changing personnel, and hence changing priorities, within the editorial group. Two of the editors from the last few years are currently reducing their commitment in order to move on to other projects, while two of us are joining the group as new editors to replace them.

We consider the primary function of Freedom to be anarchist propaganda. As well as being a paper for people within the movement to read, it should represent the whole of that movement to people outside, who are trying to find out about anarchism. We think the paper should be based firmly on class struggle anarchism, but also give respect to other tendencies within anarchist thought.

Freedom is, and will remain, a fortnightly newspaper, and we welcome submissions, but due to the constraints of space we can't promise to publish everything we receive. We'd like to encourage anyone who's interested in writing more contemplative or longer articles than we can usually print to consider submitting them to our comrades at Black Flag magazine for publication there. You can contact them at Black Flag, BM Hurricane, London WC1N 3XX or email black_flag@lycos.co.uk.

Freedom editorial group
freedomcopy@aol.com

Submissions

Contributions are wanted for a new youth culture based magazine aiming to draw links between underground hip-hop and punk scenes and class struggle anarchist politics.

The deadline for submissions will be Wednesday 31st December. You can email us at almostsober@riseup.net or by post to Almost Sober magazine, PO Box 375, Knaphill, Woking, Surrey, GU21 2XL.

Next issue

The next issue will be dated 22nd November and the last day for copy will be Thursday 13th November. You can send articles to us by snail mail or at FreedomCopy@aol.com

Hunger strike continues

Demanding their release, five of the seven protesters arrested during the demos against the EU Summit last June in Thessaloniki, are continuing their hunger strike. They are Suleiman Dakduk (Castro), who has been on hunger strike for over forty days, Simon Chapman (UK), Fernando Perez, and Carlos Martin, who've all been on hunger strike since 5th October, and Spiros Tsitsas who's been without food since 7th October. Recently, Spiros Tsitsas was transferred for a few hours to the hospital to be given first aid due to arterial pressure disorders and after suffering successive fainting shocks. On the whole, the health situation of the hunger strikers is worsening by the day and their permanent transfer to the hospital is a matter of days.

The decision for the hunger strike was caused by the attitude of the judicial authorities that regard the accused as already guilty, thereby grossly violating the principle of 'assumed innocence'. Moreover, the decision on their pre-imprisonment, as well as the overruling of requests for their release, are solely based on a generalising verdict about their 'dangerousness' and the possibility of them committing punishable acts if released. It is however obvious that what in reality is keeping them imprisoned is the already in June apparent need for an 'exemplary punishment' of the arrested protesters.

Additionally to these tactics, there is also the special status of detention the hunger strikers are receiving in the Diavata judicial prison of Thessaloniki. Hunger strike, while an unalienable

right registered in the Penal Code, is considered in Diavata to constitute a disciplinary offence with an unofficial penalty of denying the hunger strikers communication with their intimate people. This inhuman treatment explicitly constitutes not only a violation of one of the most elementary rights of the prisoners, but an insult to our legal civilisation as a whole.

Thessaloniki Prisoners Support Group
Contact thessalonikiprisoners@yahoo.co.uk or write to them at Box 11, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

Witnesses needed

LDMG (Legal Defence and Monitoring Group) are urgently seeking witnesses to arrests at both Mayday in London and DSEi in September. One woman keen to trace witnesses was with the Samba band in Pall Mall/Haymarket,

when she was arrested at about 4.15pm on Mayday. Her trial takes place in November.

A legal observer from LDMG was arrested at DSEi on 10th September, whilst a man was attacked by the police. The legal observer has been charged with assaulting a police officer. She was arrested at the entrance to the alley by Ivy Road and Butchers Road. We also need to contact the man who was assaulted.

If you can help with any of the above, please email or write to us, and please try and include as much detail as you can. We will then pass the information on to solicitors. The information you provide may prevent someone being sent to prison.

Contact LDMG, c/o BM Haven, London WC1N 3XX or email ldmgmail@yahoo.co.uk
Also see ww2.phreak.co.uk/ldmg/index.php

LISTINGS

Birmingham

16th November Gatecrash the CBI Conference, 6pm at the ICC. Contact wmanarchists@email.com or call 07973 697430. See www.wmanarchists.org

Brighton

8th November What Future for Palestine: Road Map or Apartheid? public meeting from 1pm to 5pm, Sallis Benney Theatre, Brighton University
9th November Joe Strummer Remembrance Sunday at Concorde 2, Madeira Drive, 2pm to midnight. Organised by Attila the Stockbroker
13th November Political comic Rob Newman talks about The Fountain at the Centre of the World, from 6pm at The Cowley Club Bookshop, 12 London Road. Tel 01273 696104
20th November Political cartoonist Polyp talks about Big Bad World, from 6pm at The Cowley Club Bookshop, 12 London Road. Tel 01273 696104
27th November How to do a zine, talk and workshop from 6pm at The Cowley Club Bookshop, 12 London Road. Tel 01273 696104

Edinburgh

8th November Pilger's new film Breaking the Silence: Truth and Lies in the War on Terror, part of anti-war double bill, plus film about school protests, Old Enough to Know Better. Starts 12.30pm at Edinburgh Filmhouse, tel 0131 228 2688

Leeds

8th November On the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, members of Leeds Coalition Against War will demonstrate in graphic form what should happen to the wall erected by the Israeli government between Israel and the Occupied Territories. The event will take place at 12 noon on Briggate in Leeds city centre. For more info see www.togetherforpeace.co.uk

London

30th October to 29th November No Gods, No Masters (viva anarchy) exhibition of ten artists at Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, E1 from 10.30am to 6pm, Mon to Sat

5th November to 24th December Leo Baxendale exhibition at The Cartoon Art Trust Museum, 7-13 The Brunswick Centre, Bernard Street WC1, and on 11th November at 6.30pm Leo Baxendale with give a talk. For details call 020 7278 7172.

8th November Is there such a thing as ethical journalism? talk by Pat Stannard, from 7.30pm at The Epicentre, West Street, Leytonstone E11. All welcome. See www.newsfromnowhere.info or call 020 8555 5248

8th November Smart Bombs Dumb Wars, one-day conference examining changing conditions of war and peace in the age of global terrorism, at the Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1. For further info email p.a.cohen@uel.ac.uk

10th November Emergency meeting by Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, 6.30pm at Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, to discuss Home Office's latest proposals for further tightening up of asylum policy.

10th November to 24th December Billy Childish exhibition We Are All Phonies at The Aquarium, 10 Woburn Walk, WC1. See www.aquariumgallery.co.uk or call 020 2387 8417.

11th November Conference on asylum seekers and human rights at The Great Hall, King's College, The Strand, WC2 from 9.30am onwards. Further info from 020 7593 0043 or 020 7608 7305.

11th November Haringey Solidarity Group discussion evening, Opposing ID Cards, 7pm to 9pm at Phoenix Millennium Centre, West Green Road (entrance in Vincent Road)

13th November Galileo's Finger: the extraordinary simplicity of everything, South Place Ethical Society lecture with speaker Prof Peter Atkins from 7.30pm at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, Holborn. See www.ethicalsoc.org.uk or call 020 7242 8037/4

14th November London Anarchist Forum symposium Fascism and Anti-Fascism, from 8pm to 10pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn
15th November What Future for the Palestine-Israeli Conflict? discussion with Ghada Karmi, 11am at French Institute, 17 Queensberry Place, SW7.

Call 0709 2348726 or email mondediplo-friends@mondediplo.com

19th November Anarchists versus the AWL, discussion and debate from 7.30pm at University of London Union, Malet Street

20th November Picket the Police Review gala awards dinner at Merchant Taylors Hall, Threadneedle Street in the City from 6pm. Called by Class War
25th to 29th November Drop Bush Not Bombs tour, direct action organised by Food Not Bombs will be in London at Use Your Loaf, 227 Deptford High Street, SE8

28th November London Anarchist Forum lecture on Bakunin and Chaos Theory, speaker Justin Hooper Jackson, from 8pm to 10pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn

29th November London Mayday 2004 Conference, 1pm to 5pm in Room 3a, University of London Union, Malet Street. See www.ourmayday.org.uk

12th December Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association talk on Federico Garcia Lorca, 7.30pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn
Every Wednesday the LARC Library will be open from 1pm at 62 Fieldgate Street, E1.

Manchester

8th November Immigration Laws: They Disable Us! conference at Le Meridien, Victoria & Albert Hotel, Water Street, Castlefield, organised by Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People (GMCDDP). Details from mike.higging_gmcdp@blueyonder.co.uk or 0161 273 5155 or 07968 56060
11th November Has the Human Rights Act of October 2000 entrenched refugee protection in domestic law and policy in Britain? conference. For more info contact NCADC, 1 Delaunays Road, Manchester M8 4QS, call 0121 554 6947, email ncadc@ncadc.org.uk or see www.ncadc.org.uk

6th December The Fifth Manchester Radical Bookfair from 11am to 5pm at Bridge 5 Mill, 22a Beswick Street, Ancoats. If you'd like to run a stall, discussion or workshop contact info@radicalbookfair.org.uk. For info see www.radicalbookfair.org

Newcastle

15th November Rally against occupation of Iraq and Bush's visit to these shores. Meet 12 noon at Monument for rally with speakers, music and entertainment

19th November Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the media, showing at the Side Cinema (near the Crown Posada pub on Dean Street on the quayside), 7pm. See www.sidecinema.com

3rd December My Feminism, showing at the Side Cinema (near the Crown Posada pub on Dean Street on the quayside), 7pm. See www.sidecinema.com
22nd December Dance for Peace and Solidarity benefit at Rutherford Hall, University of Northumbria from 8pm. Entry £7/£4/£3

Oxfordshire

29th November Tenth anniversary of demo at Campsfield refugee detention centre, Langford Lane, Kidlington, from 12 noon to 2pm at main gates, with guest speakers and music. Bike ride for Freedom, meet 10am at Martyr's Memorial, St Giles, Oxford, and cycle to join demo. There's also an Oxford town centre protest, meet 3pm in Broad Street. For more details contact 01865 558145 or 01993 703394. See www.closecampsfield.org.uk

Swansea

22nd November Beyond TV, annual video activist festival at Swansea Environment Centre, Pier Street. For further info call 01792 455900, email helen@videonet.org or see www.undercurrents.org/beyondtv/index.htm

Worthing

8th November Resist Bush! Protest against state visit at Montague Place from 4pm, followed by a Burning Bush event.

12th November Worthing Green Social from 8pm at Barney's café/bar, Portland Road

25th November Worthing Against War meeting upstairs at Downview pub (opp West Worthing station), 7.45pm, with Tom Hickey on The World Order After the War on Iraq

Industrial news

Not all quiet on the industrial front

As strike days top one million are we heading into a new winter of discontent?

Industrial correspondents on national newspapers have had a pretty easy job of it in recent years, often having very little to write about. The story went like this – conflict at work was a thing of the past. Where unions existed, partnership was the order of the day. Strikes were fast becoming a dim memory, particularly wildcat ones. This was of course rubbish. The story now has to be rewritten.

It seems likely that the number of days lost to strikes this year will beat 2002's twelve year high of 1.3 million. The steady increase in industrial action, reported in previous issues of Freedom, continues apace. Strikes are looming or have taken place in the civil service, amongst Heathrow airport baggage handlers, in Britain's nuclear industry, in Scottish nursery schools, amongst Aerospace workers in Belfast and on the London Underground. The last couple of weeks have also, of course, seen 30,000-plus postal workers take wildcat action. This action was initially triggered by the suspension of a driver in London.

Importantly, industrial action is producing results. Heathrow Express has been forced to recognise rail union ASLEF for full bargaining over pay and conditions following a one-day strike reported in a previous edition of Freedom.

The growing number of disputes shows a new confidence amongst workers, particularly in response to management attempts to change ways of working. GMB and Amicus members working at Sellafield are due to walk out following a successful ballot over working practices. Quite simply workers are fed up with

being pushed around and are prepared to fight back. Commenting on the postal dispute a postie on a picket line in London said "management wants to crush the union as they impose changes to terms and conditions on us." The postal workers union the CWU has said that its members feel "cheated, bullied and resentful" about the way managers have treated them.

Workers are prepared to stand their ground. They are finding out that so-called modernisation means nothing more than profits for the bosses and harder work for staff, not to mention job losses.

This is something the firefighters' union, the FBU, knows all about. Last week they responded angrily to management's attempts to withhold pay rises due this week. The pay rises are part of the package fire fighters reluctantly agreed following their bitter nine-month dispute. Bosses are arguing that the workers have not delivered so-called modernisation and so are planning to hold back on the money. The FBU have demanded payment. One official said, "we expect the employers' to honour the deal in full." This comes at a time when rank and file workers in stations are concerned about the effect of the reform package, the second part of which the FBU is expected to have accepted by the time Freedom goes to press.

Pay remains an important issue fuelling disputes. Council staff's pay has risen by 2.8% per year compared to an average 3.4% increase in the last ten years. Sadly faced with this shortfall Unison's national



Angry: postal workers picket a sorting office in London

secretary Heather Wakefield rather than demanding that the employers bump up pay has let management off the hook saying "I don't think any of us believe it [the shortfall] will be done in one hit."

Unison could learn a thing or two from the public service union PCS which is sending ballot papers to its 100,000 members working in the Home Office and Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) in a dispute over pay. The union has described the government's offer of around 2.6 per cent in the DWP and just

1.3% in the Home Office as 'derisory'. Union negotiator Jeremy Gautrey has said "with inflation running at almost 3%, council tax rising and national insurance contributions going up, a cost of living increase of 1.3% comes as a slap in the face." Union members are expected to reject the pay offers.

A glance at the history of industrial action in Britain shows it comes and goes in waves as the power between workers and bosses ebbs and flows. The 1970s saw a high point in militancy, this was

then followed by a slow decline as the Tories under Thatcher used unemployment and employment laws to attack worker rights. Blair, who once boasted that Britain had the most restrictive employment laws in Europe, kept the screws tight. It looks though as if worker militancy is on the up again. Anarchists should do all they can to show solidarity for workers in dispute as well as helping organise in their own workplaces.

Anarchist Workers Network
www.awn.org.uk

On the picket line

The second regular roundup of industrial action, strikes, occupations, ballots and direct action in the workplace from 16th October to 2nd November, brought to you by the Anarchist Workers Network and strikewatchUK.

Strikes

- Ninety thousand postal and council workers launched a one-day strike over London weighting allowances. The industrial action in London disrupted mail deliveries, schools and refuse collection.

The following day 120 Transport and General Workers Union members struck against 63 proposed job losses at Interserve. Interserve is a private company which carries out housing repairs and maintenance on behalf of the council. It is thought that the vast majority of their 424 colleagues refused to cross the picket lines and also downed tools.

- Nuclear strike shut down Sellafield Atomic Power Plant when workers

voted on their first industrial action in thirty years over a long-running pay dispute. Some 1,700 GMB and Amicus members were to strike to equalise pay between different grades of staff.

- Bus drivers in North Ireland began a series of one-day-strikes over pay. The strikes will affect Ulsterbus and Citybus services, and about 180,000 passengers.

- Seven hundred bus drivers crippled the public transport in Newcastle and Tyneside with a strike following the rejection of a new pay deal from Stagecoach. The company believes around three hundred routes would be halted, affecting around 150,000 passenger journeys.

- In Dundee nursery nurses struck for one week closing down 13 nurseries and 22 nursery classes across the city.

They join the rolling programme of industrial action by nursery nurses in Scotland. Five thousand nurses in workplaces across East, North and South Ayrshire, Perth, Argyll and Bute,

Moray, Aberdeenshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Stirling, the Borders and Orkney are involved.

- Workers at troubled Belfast aerospace company Bombardier Shorts begin industrial action on the weekend of the 1st November. As Freedom goes to press, T&G and Amicus members – 4,000 out of the 5,500-strong workforce, were due to start an overtime ban.

- Two one-day strikes were staged by workers at the Yeovil-based helicopter manufacturers Westland last week after union members rejected a new pay offer. More strikes are planned for November and December. Around four hundred staff from the Westland Transmissions site and a further 860 technical staff from the bargaining unit of Westland Helicopters were due to walk out on Wednesday and Friday. Unfortunately, although the Transmissions workers walked out, the technical staff decided to postpone their strike, despite 85% of them voting in favour of the action.

- On Sunday 2nd November, members of the Transport and General Workers Union working for two companies run by Swissport walked out for 48 hours. They work as baggage handlers and check-in staff for 21 airlines including Aer Lingus, El Al, Malaysian and Singapore Airlines. The union said many of its members have received no pay rise for eighteen months.

- Eight hundred mint (coin manufacturing) workers at the plant in Llantrisant, South Wales, return after walkout. The union Amicus says its members will stop work one day a fortnight until they get an increased pay offer.

Campaigns

After a period when McDonalds Workers Resistance (MWR) had seemed a bit lost with a number of people leaving the job or the organisation, it looks like things are on the up again as in the last few days several new workers have indicated they would like to become involved. One of the things that is rejuvenating the resistance is the

pay campaign for £6 an hour in the UK that was initiated by MWR in Birmingham.

As the news spreads through the workforce we face the strange prospect of negotiating directly with McDonalds for the first time ever. How will we get them to talk to us? Well, they will have no choice when we turn up on their doorsteps. We have addresses and are not afraid to go door knocking ... after all, it seems to work for the Jehovah's Witnesses!

To publicise the pay campaign and generally raise the profile of the resistance, we have recently printed thousands of stickers to give away to anyone in the UK who can stick 'em up on or around their local McDonalds. If you live in the UK, just send an addressed envelope stamped to the value of £1.20 to our address below, and we will also enclose free campaign leaflets and an introduction to McDonalds Workers Resistance.

Contact MWR, c/o 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh, EH7 5HA, email info@mwr.org.uk or see www.mwr.org.uk

Britain

How was it for you?

Annual anarchist bookfair ... biggest ever ... huge success ... over three thousand people ... largest anarchist event in the world ...

There's something about a successful anarchist bookfair that brings about feelings of bitter disappointment and depression. All those sordid little tables with smug little vendors peddling their absolute crap. Okay, so it's a flea-market for the sartorially challenged but why do we have to revel in it: "you may not like my stuff, but that's because you lack my insight ..." Yeah, right.

Because something is badly written, designed and printed doesn't make it purer. It just makes it badly written, designed and printed. Something to say needs presentation, and a good cover doesn't make a book the spawn of McDonald's. We produce our crappy little product and feel good. Perhaps we put it on the free table untainted by commercialism. And then nobody reads it, and it's thrown away at the end of the day. We make tackiness into a revolutionary virtue.

We're not a political movement; we're a religious one peddling a morality and lifestyle. An insular little sect priding itself on its purity and exclusiveness. Meetings were booked and held on the basis of "oh well, I suppose we better do something." If people couldn't see the 'inner beauty' of what was being provided (meetings or printed) then that was down to the 'consumers' lack of knowledge/clichés. There was no sense of reaching out to people, of trying to make a connection, of having something to say.

I suppose Christians have some justification for peddling the same thousands

of years old crap, but why do anarchists have to do the same. It's not just the lack of creativity, the lack of anything new, but the feeling of sticking to this code. Nothing new to say is just a death.

All those pictures of cats with their brains exposed are just our equivalent of the anti-abortionists. And there is something essentially dodgy about basing a liberation movement on living things other than ourselves. Another fox saved while another dog on a string gets trampled by the bookfair. We even finance ourselves like a religion with just under half of the cost of the bookfair financed by passing the collection plate/bucket.

And at what point did it become so obligatory to be so joyless. My revolution was about lack of constraints and a real freedom, not a code that marks people. All black clothes, plus two, spell Krondstadt, plus one, that sausage roll, go back to Go. Even though a lot of what passes for anarchism (and the bookfair) is getting laid, wasted or pissed, it's done with a spirit of masochism.

And this flea market that is the British Anarchist movement. Is this our vision of an alternative society? Is this what we want to put forward as our statement of intent? Truth is, if I bring a non-anarchist to the Bookfair, I'm embarrassed. People are curious; they hear we're a growing force. And then they come along to something less interesting and less attractive than an Essex car boot sale, populated by people from the 1980s.



Luckily anarchist realise this. What they want is to move back to the confines of Conway Hall and have the old mini-Bookfair with just the selected few. Where everyone you meet you know.

We can hand out leaflets to each other, suck on our brown food and bicker in our usual contented way.

Because we don't have anything new to say, and we don't want to say it well. We want to be a collection of young

white males with father/authority issues rather than an alternative vision of society. We've got too big; we're in danger of getting bigger. It's scary. It's time to downsize.

Martin

News in Brief

Cop Jamboree

Class War are calling a picket of the Police Review Gala Awards Dinner, being held on Thursday 20th November. For the past eleven years these jamborees have taken place with no opposition. This year, as the hyenas and jackals gather to fete themselves, join the demonstration outside – see London listings for details.

This year's banquet sees David Blunkett join police from the ACPO, the Superintendents' Association and Police Federation. These second-rate sordid imitation Oscars provide their winners with three grand to traipse abroad and investigate policing in other countries. Come along as Class War present their own alternative police awards.

Student rent strike

Students at King's College, Cambridge, have started a rent strike. Students at the college, which is part of Cambridge

University, voted last week by 201 to 65 in favour of direct action in protest at the rising cost of living in the college.

More than 120 students are now taking part in a rent strike. Rents have risen by almost 30% since an earlier rent strike in 1999. The students feel academic staff are enjoying unnecessary privileges while students suffer the consequences. Most students at King's are committed to widening access to Cambridge University.

The high cost of living is a huge barrier to applications and comes on top of the cost of tuition fees and proposed top-up fees. If you want to get involved in setting up a student anti-capitalist network click on www.anarchistyouth.net

St Agnes Place eviction

St Agnes Place is South London's oldest squatted street, housing a community which has been in existence for nearly

thirty years. Lambeth Council is now attempting to evict fourteen houses from it. On October 24th a large presence of concerned citizens scared off the bailiffs, and it was feared they would return at the end of October. On 30th and 31st October, residents were on alert, building barricades and erecting a scaffolding tower. Police were seen circling the area, but the bailiffs didn't turn up – so for now St Agnes Place lives on! However the bailiffs could still turn up at any time so anarchists nearby must be ready to these people's homes – as we all should try to do in our own communities. For updates, and to listen to their web-radio station log onto www.stagnesplace.org

Terrorism Act used lawfully

On 31st October, the High Court decided that the Metropolitan Filth had been acting lawfully when they searched people under S.44 of the Terrorism Act

at the protests against the DSEi arms fair in London's Docklands this September.

This was not unexpected: the Act's provisions allow the police to search who they like, when they like, without any reason. It has emerged that this power had been in force in London since February 2001. S.44 effectively revives the infamous 'sus' laws, but removing the need for suspicion. civil rights group Liberty intend to appeal against the decision.

Stop Bayer's GM Crops!

Bayer Cropscience was formed in 2002 when the German pharmaceutical and chemical company, Bayer AG, bought out Aventis Cropscience. Aventis Cropscience was heavily involved in the genetic engineering of food as well as the agrochemical business. Bayer AG is such a dodgy company that it has trademarked smack, and was part of IG

Farben, which during World War Two was involved in concentration camp slave labour and nerve gas manufacture.

At the moment Bayer Cropscience is pushing hard for GM crops to be grown commercially, out of the eleven potential crops that could be grown, nine are owned by Bayer, this could be as early as Spring 2004. Bayer are currently being targeted by a national umbrella group calling itself 'Stop Bayer's GM Crops!' This group has pledged "to make GM crops economically unviable for Bayer," and have said they will be targeting Bayer "until it pulls out of GM food."

A noise demo has been organised to take place outside Bayer's Newbury HQ on Thursday 13th November lasting all day, starting at 10am. For more details see the excellent website www.stopbayergm.org If you can't make the demo there is a whole lot more that you can do!

International

Liberty and livelihood

Workers march as new forms of self organisation develop in Brazil, according to the Anarchist Federation of Gaúcha (FAG)

From 22nd to 25th June there was a march from Gravataí (Metropolitan area) to Porto Alegre, in defence of the Emergency Fronts for Work and Housing for about 2,510 unemployed families. This march was organised and carried out by the Committees of Popular Resistance (CRPs), the National Movement of Garbage Reclaimers (MNCR) and the Movement of Unemployed Workers (MTD).

The current governor of the State, Germano Rigotto (PMDB) and his government had cancelled the project of the Frentes Emergenciais de Trabalho which had been won in 2000 by these movements, and which were organised in workgroups (cooperatives, associations) during 2001 and 2002 to give support to hundreds of families. The demands were and are, basically:

- minimum wage for one year for each unemployed family;
- food subsidy of 80 Reais;
- availability of microcredit for work projects.

Organised in these movements, in which the FAG directly participates in the CRPs and in the MNCR, workers and unemployed workers are setting up bakeries, clothing groups, community mess halls, recycling exchanges, and have been strengthening their recycling associations, etc. Once financing is obtained, we will guarantee the support and the viability of these projects, that are, in the opinion of the FAG, rearguards for the popular struggle. Yes, because as we all know, 'an empty bag will not stand up', and the people need to win work and income to have more and more vitality in order to move forward in the struggle. We don't want economic structures simply to win a few pennies and then we will all be happy. We have never believed in this for a moment.

Economic structures are needed to feed and to give a minimum of dignity to those families who struggle in the social movements, and starting from that to go on struggling.

At the end of this march, the governor endorsed our list of demands. However, so far the only thing that has arrived was a miserable basket of basic goods that didn't last even two weeks.

Therefore, our fight goes on, pressing the government through marches, occupations, etc, while at the same time the CRPs have been growing reasonably well in the peripheral areas of Porto Alegre and the metropolitan area. The struggle for work is without a doubt central axis to mobilise this social movement, the residents of the city outskirts.

The committees of popular resistance
The CRPs are organisations of the residents of the urban periphery where

the FAG contributes directly through direct social insertion, in other words, residents that belong to FAG and live the same dramas as their neighbours. The CRPs, besides accomplishing the direct struggle for immediate conquests through the direct participation of the people in all decisions, carries out day by day those values that we want to build: solidarity, mutual respect, active and direct participation, direct democracy, direct action, and an end to gossip, apathy and disunity. How? Through what we call 'regular activities': the residents participate directly in everyday activities, and from there, they carry out in practice the new values. The regular activities vary in accordance with the situation: child recreation, educational support, adult literacy, community food halls, community radio, popular festivals and parties, etc. The important thing is to create in the CRP a regular group, that exercises solidarity and struggle and that little by little can influence others.

The Movement of Garbage Reclaimers
This movement exists at a national level, and here in the Metropolitan Area the bases of the mobilised 'catadores' (the garbage reclaimers) are under our influence. Both in the State and throughout Brazil itself there exist several other forces active in this movement, with the greatest influence being that of the Articulação de Esquerda. The movement is organised through nuclei. Each recycling hangar or warehouse of materials can form a nucleus of the movement.

Today, there is also a state organisation that articulates the movement, and a federal organisation, that articulates it on a national level. This movement has been growing day by day, together with poverty and the casualisation of labour. We have been active in this area since 1995, and the MNCR today is also the fruit of our efforts. One of the fights that we took part in was the one to obtain public resources to sustain the work structures of the 'catadores', who were not subsidised by the State or by local government, that left the workers 'to decide' to do a service that is, in effect, a public service and that helps to save the budgets of the municipal district for recycling, since the 'catadores' do it practically for free. Therefore, we struggle to obtain subsidies for this work from the State and the municipal authorities, to be administered directly by the 'catadores'.

Both the CRPs and the MNCR look to strengthen from below four basic principles: class solidarity, class independence, grassroots democracy and direct action.

Our policy is to try to connect these movements to each other and to all the other struggle movements, like the MTD, the unions, neighbourhood associations, schools, etc. The whole



organised spectrum of the oppressed classes that are connected even remotely with the question of direct struggle is looking for relations and united work. Our objective is, in the long term, to form a front of the oppressed, where several

movements converge for only one objective: the direct struggle for their needs.

Therefore, amid many difficulties, conflicts and small victories, we continue to build our strategy in practice. Saúde e Anarquia!

Luciana, sec. relações
Federação Anarquista Gaúcha

For more information contact the FAG at fag.internao@terra.com.br or write to cx postal 5036 CEP 90040-970, Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil. See www.fag.rg3.net

International news in brief

Serbia

More than 13,000 Serbian doctors went on strike for a 40% pay increase. They had already been working to rule for a month.

Poland

People from FA-Krakow (part of the Polish Anarchist Federation) participated in a picket organised by single parents (mostly women) against the government's plan to cut the funds for single parents. The government argues that it's trying to 'decentralise' social services and bring it 'closer to the people', by placing the cost of social services on the local government. The local government of course doesn't have funds for it, so in fact it's a way of liquidating the service. The police have pressed charges against some of the women, claiming the demonstration was illegal.

Canada

Almost three years after the large protests against the Summit of the Americas and FTAA in Quebec City in

April 2001, Canadian anarchist Jaggi Singh's jury trial in Quebec City will begin on 19th January 2004. He is facing a penalty of up to two years in prison if convicted, though if found guilty a sentence of several months is more likely.

Jaggi has issued an appeal for assistance from the anarchist movement. If you can help in any way, please get in touch by e-mail at bothjaggisingh2003@yahoo.ca and at jaggi@tao.ca. Also, if you can send him any money towards his legal costs, email him!

Iraq

Thirteen American servicemen were killed and more than twenty wounded in an attack on a US military Chinook helicopter. It has taken the heaviest toll on US personnel since the fall of Saddam in April. Villagers collected pieces of wreckage as souvenirs and inhabitants of nearby Falluja rejoiced in the streets. Iraqi resistance to the occupation continues to intensify, as

attacks on US forces now average over thirty per day, according to the BBC.

Argentina

The Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupado (Movement of Unemployed Workers) Anibal Veron (MTDAV) announced they were holding a meeting with President Kirchner concerning reports of an end to benefits for the unemployed and the formation of an anti-piquetera brigade. Moves to criminalise social protest also appear to be in the agenda in Argentina.

The MTDAV are pressing the Argentine government to hold a thorough investigation into the massacre of 26th June 2002. They further demand a special benefit payment at the end of the year to all those in receipt of unemployment benefit; strong investment in production projects; an affordable housing plan for the unemployed; and a review by the employment minister Tomada of plans to end unemployment benefits – and a guarantee by the government that these payments continue.

Editorial

Migrant labour is essential to the economy. So runs the 'best' argument the left can now manage in support of immigration and migrant rights. It was put again by Steve Pope in the Guardian last week (28th October). Refugees may be vilified by politicians and "a British public convinced that ... immigrants are robbing the benefit system and taking their jobs from under their noses," he said. But "the fact is that Western economies need cheap migrant labour."

It's a grim fact that 'they're welcome here because they're cheap' is what passes for anti-racist argument these days. Yet to tell immigrant workers they're 'good for the economy' because their illegal status means they work for poverty wages fails on two counts. It offers them nothing and it doesn't reassure a working class concerned about being undercut in the labour market.

After 1945, around thirty million people entered Western European to meet the new demand for labour. This followed the switch to mass production, an increased division of labour, shift work and piece work. Capital has always demanded immigration policies to suit its needs. The deterritorialisation of capital which followed its head-on clashes with the European working class just showed that its needs had changed.

If it's to roam the world to find the cheapest labour, capital needs it to be static. Unemployment and underemployment in the 'Third World' was the precondition for the exploitation of migrant labour in the postwar period, but now capital needs the poor of the world to stay put and be exploited at home. This explains (the bit the left doesn't get) the anti-immigration policies pursued so fervently by the Labour government.

Some elements of capital still need low-paid illegal workers, but the greater demand is for the fettering of labour mobility. In other words, to argue that immigrants are 'good for the economy' misses the point and reduces the left to endorsing the super-exploitation of a section of the working class. What's good for the economy isn't necessarily good for those exploited within it.

Faced with the free movement of capital, it's crucial that working class organisations fight for labour's freedom of movement and give concrete support to anti-deportation campaigns. Yet on its own this isn't enough.

Capital clearly intends to play sections of the working class off against each other, switching production from country to country and using illegal labour to undercut wages. So it's vital that we build solidarity across borders and fight for the extension of full employment rights, the minimum wage and the right to work legally to immigrant workers.

To reduce the anti-racist argument to 'they're good for the economy' just serves to rubber-stamp the exploitation of both immigrant and host-country workers at the hands of those we're supposed to oppose.

Quiz answers

1. The Japanese ambassador to China.
2. Wobbly humourist T-Bone Slim.
3. He suggested they should get the APEC message across by mass-mobilisation techniques, including the internet, consciously aping anti-capitalist protesters.
4. It was the vehicle for 1970s BBC comedy Citizen Smith, which poked fun at the pretensions of some 'revolutionaries'.

Commentary

Primitive

I was disappointed by the first Green and Black Bulletin (Freedom, 25th October). This isn't because I'm against Freedom covering ecological issues, far from it. A regular column on green issues would benefit the paper immensely. Anarchism and ecology are intertwined and any relevant form of anarchism must be rooted in an ecological perspective.

But I have reservations about the bulletin. It says it will be a 'primitivist' column, so excluding most forms of ecological anarchism from the start. To suggest that anarcho-primitivism is 'green anarchism' is blinkered, sectarian and false. This, in turn, doesn't fill me with confidence that the column will have anything positive to say about eco-anarchism or, indeed, anarchism itself.

I know it's early days, but to start off by attacking other anarchists for being 'reformist' and by proclaiming that it's a case of 'anarcho-primitivism versus anarchism' doesn't bode well for the future.

In the article the Wildfire Collective present, the late John Moore says, for example, that 'classical anarchism' simply wants to 'rework' modern society and "remove its worst abuses and oppressions" leaving "99% of life ... unchanged." So the 'worst abuses and oppressions' of capitalism account for just 1% of life? This sounds like a comment the apologists for capitalism would make.

Moore also has little trust in the creative abilities of the bulk of the population. He seems to think that people who'd gone to the trouble of smashing the state and kicking the bosses out would stop there, leaving industry and technology unchanged; that workers would continue doing the same sort of work, in the same way, using the same methods as before. But all anarchists agree that it isn't enough to get rid of the boss. This is just a necessary first step!

Of course 'classical anarchists' doubt that workers who use technology and work in industry would leave either unchanged (see Kropotkin's Conquest of Bread). Actually they want to liberate the technology they use from the distorting influences of capitalism, just as they want to liberate themselves. This will take time and it will be an imperfect process (but primitivists seem to be impatient, subscribing to what Kropotkin rightly dismissed as a harmful fallacy – the idea of a one-day revolution). Moore simply distorts the ideas of 'classical anarchism' in his assertions.

On a different issue, looking at the arguments in the Green and Black Bulletin I'm struck by how vague 'anarcho-primitivism' is. For example, Moore says that the "kind of world envisaged by anarcho-primitivism is one unprecedented in human experience" and that "there are no hard-and-fast rules" in getting there. In other words, we don't know what we want nor how to get there!

Even worse, he says, "there can't be any limits on the forms of resistance and insurgency that might develop." Whatever happened to the anarchist principle that means shape the ends? In other words, there are 'limits' on tactics, as some tactics aren't and never can be libertarian. More on this below.

Incidentally, I can't help thinking that all this talk of 'civilisation' lets the ruling class off the hook, for both our and the planet's problems. Instead, blame is laid at the feet of 'technology' and 'mass society'. So the capitalist class can rest easy – injustice, authority,

oppression and ecocide aren't their fault, they're simply the inevitable result of 'mass society'.

Rather than seeing power originating in socio-economic relationships, it's rooted in 'the machine'. Ironically, this is the mirror image of Engels's argument in On Authority. For him, technology meant that freedom was impossible during production. He wanted to keep technology and dump autonomy. Primitivists want to dump technology, suggesting that the bulletin's comments on workers' control being 'workers' self-exploitation' have more in common with classical Marxism than with classical anarchism.

This isn't the only convergence with Marxism. Primitivism seems to share with Leninism an objectivist vision of social change. For Leninists, it's the economic crisis that puts 'socialism' (that is, state capitalism) on the agenda.

Similarly, for the primitivists it's when 'civilisation collapses' through 'its own volition'. Perhaps this is because they know the mass of people view their utopia with horror, quite rightly. After all, Moore doesn't explain how the UK could feed nearly sixty million people by primitivist (hunting and gathering) means.

Nor should we forget that one of the editors of Green Anarchist has said he'd prefer 'mass starvation' to 'mass government', that is, existing – 'mass' – society. Perhaps this explains why, according to Moore, primitivism doesn't "seek to ... win converts". Why bother, when society will collapse and people won't have a choice? The idea of anarchism being created from below, by the conscious desires of the oppressed for freedom and justice is completely missing.

What of Moore's comments that civilisation may, perhaps, collapse "through our own efforts" and that only "widespread refusal ... can abolish civilisation"? He doesn't explain how this can be achieved if he's not seeking 'converts' (that is, if you're not convincing people of your ideas).

But as he argues that 'daily life' is marked by "internalised patterns of obedience," he implies that, by 'our' in 'our own efforts', he means primitivists – far from the classical anarchist idea of a revolt by the people. He talks of 'communities of resistance', yet he doesn't root them in the workplace or the neighbourhood, hence in practical concerns of most people.

The Wildfire Collective concurs, dismissing "workers' councils, committees" out of hand while, apparently, subscribing to Moore's idea of 'interdependent' communities. How such communities would communicate, never mind work together, without federal organisations is left unasked, never mind unanswered.

Dismissing the mass of the population (the working class) as an agent of change leaves primitivism with two options. It can either wait for the 'inevitable collapse of civilisation' (and while away the hours slagging off other anarchists as reformist) or it can embrace eco-vanguardism and celebrate any form of 'resistance' which may bring the glorious day forward.

This reached its logical conclusion some years back, when Green Anarchist magazine supported the actions and ideas of the (non-anarchist) Unabomber and published an article saying that the Oklahoma bombers had "the right idea. The pity was that they did not blast any more government offices ... The Tokyo sarin cult had the right idea. The pity was that in testing the gas a year prior to the attack they gave themselves away."

A subsequent exchange of letters in Anarchy magazine saw one editor of Green Anarchist justify this sick, authoritarian nonsense as "unmediated resistance" conducted "under conditions of extreme repression". Which makes you ask, 'resistance' to what exactly? Working people? Are they the enemy? Well, given Moore's comments about the mass of people internalising obedience, perhaps they are.

As I said above, no anarchist can talk about 'any' means of 'resistance and insurgency' being valid. Libertarian ends require libertarian means. Perhaps I'm reading too much into the reprinting of Moore's article, but given its original place of publication – Green Anarchist – it suggests a fatal unwillingness to learn from the mistakes of the past and an equal unwillingness to develop anarcho-primitivist theory to avoid the authoritarian pitfalls Green Anarchist (again) so helpfully and unintentionally exposed.

Perhaps future Green and Black Bulletins will address the issues I've raised, while opening themselves up to contributions from other kinds of eco-anarchists. I hope so, but let's wait and see.

Iain McKay

It's the elite

There's a gap in the logic of Paul Maguire's reply to my letter about asylum-seekers (Commentary, 25th October). He admits that many workers oppose immigration, yet he claims these workers are neither stupid nor racist. If they're not stupid, they must know that immigrants are fleeing worse living conditions than their own and that deportation often means torture or death. Yet, if they're not stupid, if they know all this and they still oppose immigration, they must surely be racist! If somebody opposes immigration, she or he is necessarily stupid, racist or both.

This isn't to say it's all their fault. Someone who receives a substandard education, who reads The Sun and who has never been encouraged to think for her or himself, is under a lot of pressure to be stupid and racist. Working class illusions aren't surprising, given the context – the surprise is rather the few who manage to attain critical awareness in spite of the context.

So it's no shock that many anarchists and dissidents are based in colleges. Students are simply more likely than uneducated inner-city estate residents to develop the critical abilities necessary to understand and adopt radical ideas. Even those anarchists and leftists who live on estates and work in crap jobs have mostly entered this section of the working class 'from outside', by way of a university education.

The idea of 'shared experience' is misleading. What Paul refers to as 'shared' needs are actually similar or homogenous needs. They aren't necessarily 'shared' in the sense of giving rise to collective or reciprocal relations. If two people both need a house, they can unite to build two houses or to lobby the housing authority to do so. Or they can find a house and fight each other over who gets it. There's nothing in the simple fact of similar needs that decides the question one way or the other as to which they will, or should, do.

I hope, as Paul does, that white workers, black workers and immigrants can unite and fight for improved services. But such a struggle isn't a simple or logical outcome of the existence of similar needs. The choice to co-operate rather than compete is an ethical choice,

based on a political decision or a high-level general analysis (for instance, of the world system and the nature of class power). The choice to fight against others for scarce resources is also open, and most white workers choose this approach in relation to immigrants.

This is because they think they're entitled to them whereas immigrants aren't, or because they know that if it comes to a fight in the present political context, they and not the immigrants would come out on top. The struggles Paul and I both want can't, therefore, come about as a result of his proposed strategy, but only on the basis of a transformative challenge (not merely an appeal) to what white workers think and do.

I disagree with Paul about difference and identity, because it strikes me that an alternative movement, constructed around 'what we have in common', founders when the fight for freedom and/or welfare comes up against things 'we' don't. How, for instance, can a fight for disability rights, or in defence of the nomadic and pastoral peoples of West Papua, or against sweatshops, or for tolerance for the psychologically different, or against the economic plunder of the 'Third World' be fought on the basis of 'what we have in common'?

Are we to ignore these issues or dismiss them as divisive middle class fads? Somewhere along the line, freedom necessarily exceeds fixity and sameness, and necessitates a politics of difference. Anarchist homogeneity is a contradiction in terms.

I'm not advocating a 'simple celebration of difference', and I find it difficult to see how Deleuze, Guattari and Spivak can be accused of 'simple' anything – quite the opposite, in fact! I wish these authors would write a bit more accessibly, but there's something to be said for the view that a politics of difference as conceived by them can't in any way be understood from within the confines of the system's ideologies. Certainly it has little in common with the liberal multiculturalism Paul rightly opposes. Situationism, autonomism and deep ecology are closer parallels to what I have in mind.

Since the working class is mostly subsumed within ruling class ideologies and discourses, how can a radical politics not be politics 'from the outside' of this class, even if it aims to convince and mobilise them? When I write of figurative nomadism, I'm suggesting that the working class needs to become in a sense 'outside' what it is today in order to become in any sense 'our class' for anarchists.

Workers must undergo a qualitative change in their identity before they can become a revolutionary force. This requires an intensive learning/unlearning process, not a reassertion of a pre-formed collective identity. Hence, I suggest that we start 'outside' the existing working class in order to pull this class 'outside' itself, so it can become what it isn't and thereby achieve something incommensurable with its present conception of the world.

A.R.

See editorial, left

Still confused?

As a newcomer to anarchist ideas, I feel I can reply to Peter Gibson's letter without any danger of representing 'the anarchist establishment' (Commentary, 25th October). I'll try to speak plain. The state is a concept, but this is a long way from saying 'the state doesn't exist'.

REVIEW

How many of those brought up on the Beano realised the serious intent behind some of its best-known characters, asks Pirate Ray

Leo Baxendale was for many years a comic art stalwart. Minnie, Plum and Bash Street UR 50, currently showing at London's Cartoon Art Trust Museum, is a fifty-year retrospective of the cartoonist's work. Beginning his career as a freelance artist for the Beano, he'd send his black and white drawings from Preston to Dundee, where staff artists at D.C. Thompsons would add watercolour, ready for letterpress publication. His first creation was Little Plum, in April 1953, followed in rapid succession by Minnie the Minx that September and the Bash Street Kids in October.

Baxendale insists that the overriding philosophy behind his art is to "overcome the impersonality of large-scale capitalist commodity production by putting into [his] drawings an intensity of passion that would make each printed copy of the Beano personal to the child." As a result of this spiral of "more passion, more response" artistry, he helped the comic's circulation rise from 400,000 in 1953 to two million by 1960.

Several of the early cartoon strips appear in this exhibition having been saved from fading by digital copying from originals which have to be kept in the dark. These include early appearances by Little Plum, a native American who tended to cause havoc inadvertently and who raised cowardice and treachery to high arts in order to survive.

One glorious full-page rendering from 1956 shows him in full flight, being chased by his tribe's arch-enemies, The Bears. In hot pursuit, they sport a variety of WMDs, such as Elefant Guns and Bearzookas, and carrying a flag crying 'honey' which they'd obtained from an itinerant arms dealer (shades of DSEi here).

Similarly with Minnie the Minx's

adventures. She's described as a street-fighting woman by Baxendale himself. Her main enemies are 'boys', headteachers, careers advisers and, most of all, her omnipresent dad. Most of her escapades end up with her in general mayhem.

The Bash Street Kids, everyone's favourite school rebels, are shown in their various attempts to outwit their teachers and the authorities, with varying degrees of success. A leading character in the gang was apparently based on Richmal Crompton's 'William', who wanted to be a pirate when he grew up. Baxendale used this and, by the simple expedient of drawing a skull and crossbones on his jumper, Death's-Head Danny was born (haven't I seen him with other pirates and a samba band on recent demos?).

Some space is given over to Baxendale's own explanations of his work. He elaborates his ideas thus: "art can be seductive to the practitioner and overwhelm the spectator, and it has been variously used in history to buttress systems of controlling power or, contrawise, to engage in struggle against it." Clearly he chose the second course himself, and he explains why. "The engine of history for artists has been economic need – there is the possibility to intervene in history, to be a player, to use art and comedy to engage in struggle, if intent and circumstance come sweetly together."

The middle part of the exhibition shows that, from May 1960, with Little Plum extended to a double page and an increased workload, what Baxendale describes as a 'stiffness' crept into his drawing style. The cartoons begin to show a sharper line than the more rounded ones found previously. The artist himself also suffered a bout of pneumonia at the beginning of 1961, which further affected his work.



From 1969 he began to suffer from swollen knuckles and to need drawing glasses. He attributes this to the ever-increasing workload demanded by the corporate entities. They also forced him, during the 1970s, into a seven-year copyright battle for control of his work. Of this period he writes, "intense drawing requires all of the organism: the faculties of the mind and body working as one, but the artist's nervous system takes the brunt."

The last section of Minnie, Plum and Bash Street UR 50 concentrates on Baxendale's work from the Willy the Kid era. It features numerous examples of line-drawn characters such as Spotty Dick and, particularly, Baby Basil. It includes a wonderful set piece drawn for the Women Against Pit Closures book, Deep Digs, during the Miners'

Strike of 1984-85. This shows several characters doing their bit to run down the coal stocks under the ominous approach of the police.

From 1990, Baby Basil appeared in the Guardian and Baxendale was able to give freer rein to his political ideas for an adult audience. He used the opportunity to poke fun at a variety of social attitudes. In one series, three-year-old Basil opines that "boys don't cry," only to be castigated by his older friend Cynthia for indulging in "biological determinist theory" brought on by kids being "marmalised by ideology". These strips ran until 1992 when Baxendale had to end them, again due to workload (though he continued to produce work elsewhere).

The final exhibit is his poem, written specially for the exhibition. In this, the

four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are redirected to the World Bank president's front lawn. Again, quite apt given the recent shenanigans in Cancun and elsewhere. Leo Baxendale also tells us that his cartoons have provided "a lifelong companion of comedy" to walk beside him and to "nudge against the straight and narrow [and to] warn of perils to avoid – in particular, the quack prescription of how things should be."

There's much in this small gem of an exhibition to inspire anarchists and radicals of all hues. Minnie, Plum and Bash Street UR 50 is at the Cartoon Art Trust Museum (CAT), 7-13 Brunswick Centre, Bernard Street, London WC1, until 24th December. Tel 020 7278 7172. Leo Baxendale will be talking at CAT, 6.30pm on 11th November (tickets £5). His own website is at www.reaper.co.uk

BOOKS

Wildcat: anarchists against bombs

cartoons by Donald Room
Freedom Press, £3

My current library book is a volume of the diaries of the late Tory MP and Minister of Trade, Alan Clark. His diaries are bestsellers and they expose, devastatingly, the futility of politics; the way the Civil Service ensures that nothing happens to change the way the machinery of government works; the way politicians love the chauffeur-driven, top-hotel and all-expenses-paid lifestyle; the rivalry, not between, but within the political parties.

I was pulled up sharp by one story that Clark tells with pride. As different departments of government don't consult each other, one was prosecuting a firm for exporting war material to Iraq, while another had given approval. The trial collapsed when defence counsel suggested that Clark's statement that material for Iraq was 'for general engineering purposes'

couldn't be correct.

Clark: Well, it's our old friend being economical, isn't it?

Defence Counsel: With the truth?

Clark: With the actualité. There was nothing misleading or dishonest to make a formal or introductory comment that the Iraqis would be using the current orders for general engineering purposes. All I didn't say was 'and for making munitions'.

This scrap of dialogue from real life could have been lifted from the discussions between Donald Room's truth-seeking cat and her academic friend, the long-legged ibis in Wildcat Anarchists against Bombs.

Amazingly, this is the sixth of his Wildcat volumes (all published by Freedom Press, publishers of this newspaper). This, in turn, implies that Donald must have settled down once a fortnight for about 25 years to persuade his cast of characters to be sharp and sardonic, from an anarchist standpoint, about the world they, and we, inhabit.

The 'revolting pussycat' has a way of sniffing out the unpleasant truths behind every political situation, from the vital role of the arms trade in protecting British jobs to the equally significant need for ill-rewarded illegal immigrants to do the really important, but underpaid, jobs the British scorn, but depend upon. The Wildcat is an anarchist heroine!

C.W.

Wildcat: anarchists against bombs is available from Freedom for £3 (postage free in the UK, add £1 elsewhere).

Regime Unchanged

by Milan Rai
Pluto, £10.99

"Soon Iraqis will see the great compassion of the US," George Bush promised earlier this year. Iraqis are still waiting, like everybody else, and on the evidence of Milan Rai's new book, we might have another long wait to come. The postwar sequel to the same author's War Plan

Iraq, Regime Unchanged describes the mendacity and political manoeuvring that allowed Bush and Blair to launch their assault.

Mil analyses the options for meaningful change in the country (unlikely – "Washington and London had no intention of forcing a real 'regime change' on Iraq and, when the regime dissolved ... the US and UK attempted to rebuild [it]").

There are just two hopeful signs in an otherwise grim situation. The first is the extent to which protests nearly undid plans for an invasion, at least on this side of the Atlantic (something else Mil chronicles in some depth). The second, purchased at vast human (which means Iraqi and civilian) cost, is that Bush's current travails render any imminent attack on the Iraq's neighbours unlikely.

But never mind, Georgie Baby. There's another Asian dictator who's currently riding roughshod over human rights, and in an oil-rich country to boot. The only difference is that the president of Kazakhstan is pro-western.

But what does that matter when you know, to paraphrase the words of your best buddy, that what you're doing is right?

Toby Crowe

Regime Unchanged is available from Freedom for £10.99 (add £1.10 postage in the UK, £2.20 elsewhere)

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